

First Impressions

Team Report Form



Community Visited: **Harper, KS**

Date Visited: **08/08/2020**
08/14/2020
08/25/2020

- 1. Pre-visit web search:** How easy was it to get information on the community you were visiting? Did it accurately reflect what you saw? Did you have difficulties obtaining information on the community through a web search?
 - I thought the city's website was easy to find and use. There was limited info, but enough to get what we needed.
 - The city's website was up to date with information. The photos centered on their recreation facilities were accurate.
 - Found the town's website after a quick Google search. From the website I was able to navigate smoothly to find information, it was very well organized and flowed nicely. I love the lamp post logo! All the links I tried were good, no broken links. I feel the website was an accurate representation of the town.

- 2. The "Five-Minute" Impression:** After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, the following reactions were noted.
 - There were quite a few run-down houses and businesses. I was surprised that the population was similar to Inman until we noticed the number of empty houses.
 - The town is spread out with a lot of businesses. There were many run-down properties, empty lots, some road construction, and several nice community facilities.
 - The highway was very modern, well-kept and gave the look of a thriving little town. Once I turned onto Central and headed for the Business District, though, the look changed quite a bit. I wasn't sure if any of the businesses on Main and Central were open. It looked like a nearly abandoned town. It made me very sad because that is where the lamp post/fountain that is the town's logo is located! The buildings in this area look a bit run-down and needed some TLC for sure. A drive through neighborhoods showed well-kept houses and lawns, a really nice park, and several other businesses not on the main roads.

The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances (signs, streetscapes, buildings, etc.)

- There was ok signage. I don't remember seeing any "Welcome to Harper" type of signs.
- The ditches were well mowed. Lots of businesses coming in from the east, but little in the way of directional signage.
- Very pretty houses at the major street corners, all with well-kept lawns. There was signage obvious enough for me to find my way around, which is saying something. The houses around the school were super nice. I wouldn't say there was much for streetscapes. The one cool thing the town had (the fountain) was in an area where people didn't seem to care about the ambience.

3. Downtown Business Area Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc.

- The downtown seemed a little run down. There were quite a few closed businesses on Main Street. I had the impression that downtown was beautiful 50 years ago.
- There were many brick streets, two pocket parks, a nice fountain, but many run-down/vacant buildings. Some of those buildings on the north side of the street looked like they are historic and might be attractive if fixed up.
- At Central and Main the buildings look like they have been forgotten and given up. The restaurant there was the only one well-kept and welcoming. The bank on the corner (Bank of Commerce) very specifically looked daunting and uninviting. Love the cobblestone roads and hope that the area will get a facelift. Those types of areas are always a favorite for my friends and I to explore.

Explain what type of businesses you observed and give a description of the variety and quality of merchandise displayed.

- Several restaurants, 2 banks, an insurance agency, and camper sales.
- The downtown area had mainly banks, insurance agents, and second-hand stores. Nothing really that interested me.
- No stores seen with merchandise displayed other than an antique store, which I of course went into!

Describe the customer service received when you entered those retail businesses. (Were you greeted? Did you have to ask for assistance?)

- The restaurant was friendly and had very good food and décor.
- The gentleman at the antique shop was SUPER nice and chatty. I learned more about the town businesses and goings on from him than anything else.

What public amenities (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, trash receptacles and wi-fi, etc.) were available?

- They had a really nice park that my 2 girls loved.
- I didn't see any in my time downtown.
- I didn't walk around in the park, I'm not sure what the current rules are for parks. I did notice plenty of covered picnic space, restrooms, and trash receptacles. For anyone adverse to using the park restroom, Casey's was available. There was also a gazebo downtown.

Comment on landscaping and streetscaping. Did you have difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

- There was good parking available, even with the county fair going on.
- Parking was spread out so I had to drive around a lot. There were two pocket parks but little streetscaping/landscaping.
- I did not notice much for streetscapes, but I didn't miss it either. There was plenty of parking all over town for being a weekday with no one to contend with. I can see where finding parking during the carnival might be an issue, but I could be wrong. If you park at the Casey's or near there, you have access to several services/businesses. If you park on Central and Main you'll have a walk ahead of you to get to the "happening" part of town. However, there were buildings that look like they must be used for town gatherings and fairs right there, and a restaurant, too, so it wouldn't be too much of a hardship.

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

Describe other retail shopping areas. Were the areas attractive and easy to access?

- There were other retail shopping areas, but we did not go into any of the businesses. Noticed that most of the new business was moving to the south and southwest side of town which pulls business from downtown.
- The main stores seemed to be the grocery store, Dollar General, and True Value. They were not close together. The buildings I drove by to get into downtown were Hilger Insurance, the eye doctor, several salons, a Casey's, the Red Rooster, and Beals Orchard. There were some industrial businesses, too.
- We ate at the Red Rooster Café and had wonderful service. I would drive the 1 ½ hours to eat there again. Also had ice cream at the drive-in. We thought it was closed when we drove by and only went back after seeing a Yelp review.
- Casey's workers did not take any notice of me when I went in. They were pretty busy, and helping customers. The waitress at the Red Rooster was amazing, and the gal at Beals was quite pleasant as well. No one left me hanging, looking for help, and Casey's was the only place that did not greet me as I came in.

- The highway retail was modern and busy. I would think that would be where people are attracted to look for services. There was not much for retail shopping that I saw, only the antique shop. Are there gift stores or clothing stores in town? I didn't see any in person or on the website.

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

Is there a defined area where manufacturing industries could easily locate/expand? If so, describe.

- There is an airport. There is room in their industrial area and other commercial areas on the west side, meaning there might be a possibility for expansion.
- Driving in from the north, the industrial area is what you notice first. There are a few houses in the mix, but it's definitely the industrial area of town with what appears to be plenty of room to expand.
- There were several large buildings with plenty of parking for customers and workers. You could tell it was the industrial area and not for everyday shopping. The businesses in this area appeared clean and didn't appear to be causing any air pollution. Well-kept and respectable looking.

6. Health Care Services

Comment on the availability and apparent quality of hospitals and emergency medical services.

- The hospital in town was closed, but we saw that Harper/Anthony built a new one between towns. It appeared to be state-of-the-art when we drove to look at it.
- There is a nice newer hospital 4 miles south with EMT services between Harper and Anthony.
- It looked like there was a good-sized hospital just off the highway and the building looked clean.

Comment on the availability and condition of facilities for physicians, dentists, optometrists, public health and other healthcare providers.

- We noticed the pharmacy and eye doctor.
- There is a wellness center, eye doctor, chiropractor, and pharmacy. They all appeared to be average to very nice.
- There was an optometrist on Main and I noticed flyers in the city building relating to health and mental help. The optometrist's office looked busy and the building was in good condition. If there were other healthcare facilities, I did not come across them.

What long-term care services, assisted living or nursing facilities exist in the community?

- Heritage Estates.
- We found an assisted living facility with about 24 apartments, but did not see any long-term care nursing homes.
- I did not notice any of these types of services, and don't recall seeing any listed on the website.

7. Housing

Give a brief description of the existing mix of housing stock. Does the local market have housing that would appeal to all income wages? What challenges do you see in regards to finding acceptable housing? (Neighborhoods, size, properties for sale, etc.)

- Many of the houses had wonderful landscaping, flowers, etc. which made for a nice drive around town. Multiple housing options available that covered a wide price range. Most of the lower priced houses were in poor shape and had been listed for sale for a long time.
- There appeared to be a shortage of homes for sale, especially in the mid-price range. The housing is not appealing for the community due to the number of homes that need repairs or maintenance.
- I saw several signs advertising houses for sale, but not an abundance. The housing around town had a definite variety of assumed income levels. Neighborhoods did not seem to me to have clearly defined borders. One block was super nice houses and the next was more run-down looking. It seemed to me that the closer you lived to the highway the nicer the house was. Most houses going further into town were a little less nice. There were some gems several blocks away from the highway though, so maybe that's a wrong impression.
- The challenge for finding acceptable housing was the lack of availability. Perhaps people in the town really like being there and don't want to move. Renting at the big apartment complex would be a decent place to start while trying to find a home.

What kind of rental properties did you observe for persons interested in building or simply living in the community prior to buying housing?

- I did not notice any rental properties, nor could I find any available online.
- There looked to be a shortage of rental properties. Very few signs and most appeared to be in poor condition.
- There was only one rental sign I noticed and that was for a small apartment building. There was a flyer in the city building for the newer apartment complex. The best choice for rental seemed to be the newer apartment complex as the other apartment was not in as good repair.

8. Schools

What schools are present? (Head Start, Preschool, K-8, High School, Post-Secondary, etc.) Do the schools appear to be adequate in size? Are the buildings and grounds well-maintained?

- The elementary school was well maintained, as was the high school outside of town.
- The pre-K to 6th grade school is in Harper. The Jr/Sr high (Chaparral) is located 4 miles south of town between Harper and Anthony. The schools looked fine. The high school is newer and nice. Did not notice any post-secondary schools.
- There was a big elementary school. It looked quite large, which from the website I gather that there are several towns that kind of pool together, so that would make sense. The grounds and building looked very well maintained. It seemed to be a safe and clean place for children to learn. The school website was a bit atrocious and hard to navigate.

Were you able to find online information in the community that helped assess the quality of the educational system?

- The school's website was linked to the city's.
- I went to the USD website through the link on the city's page but it wasn't working at the time.
- There was a link on the town's website to the school district. The website was of poor quality and difficult to navigate. The aesthetic was off-putting and not much engaging or eye-catching.

9. Childcare

What childcare service are available? Is it affordable?

- I could not find any info on childcare.
- There are two childcare centers in town. I don't know about affordability.
- I did not see pricing for childcare. There were two local businesses listed on the website and I saw a different one when driving around.

10. Faith/Religion

Comment on the number of denominations and the physical appearances of the places of worship represented in the community. Did you observe any evidence of faith-based community services?

- There were multiple denominations present (Catholic, Methodist, Mennonite, etc.). All of the church buildings and grounds were well taken care of.
- There were 6 or more different denominations. Appearances varied by age, but all seemed ok. I did not notice any evidence of faith-based community services in town.

- In the first 5 minute drive around town I noticed 3 or 4 churches. I don't think anyone would have a problem finding one to attend. No evidence of faith-based community services, however.

11. Civic

Tell about the variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community.

- I could only find Harper Recreation through the city's Facebook postings.
- There is a VFW, American Legion, and Lions Club. There is also a Helping Hands group and the Chamber of Commerce that is currently meeting by Zoom meeting and has no paid director at the time of the visit.
- Were there any? None noticed.

Did you observe any evidence of civic organization activity?

- No.
- No.
- I did not.

12. Public Infrastructure

Comment in general on the streets, street signage, sidewalks, parking, lighting, restrooms, landscaping, and streetscapes in areas **other than downtown**.

- The streets were good and well marked. The last several blocks at the end of town were unpaved. The restrooms at the park were clean.
- There were many brick streets, several unpaved streets and roads closed due to construction of a city water line/public improvement project (ball field concession stand/shelter). Not many signs for navigation. The park, pool, tennis court and baseball diamonds were nice. Sidewalks in some areas of town were overgrown or buckled because of trees.
- Street signs were visible. I didn't really notice sidewalks around the highway or in other areas/neighborhoods. I couldn't really say much about the lighting as it was the middle of the day. I would say the non-retail/commercial parts of Harper are quite similar to most other small towns and that is why I didn't really notice these types of things one way or another.

Comment on city/town hall (How were you received? Was there information about the town available?)

- We visited on Saturday and City Hall wasn't open.
- The city hall was nice and located downtown. They received a grant to improve their basement and move their library to another location. The staff was very helpful and informative.
- The lady at the desk greeted me, but did not offer any advice, history, information, or anything when I told her I was exploring the town on a road trip. She seemed nice enough, but not an outgoing type of person. I didn't see any flyers or brochures specifically about Harper, though there were some things about Kansas in general.

Police/fire protection:

- Did not notice police or fire protection.
- The police department is in with the city office. The volunteer fire department was located just south of the city office. It reportedly has much new equipment.
- I drove by two police cars parked in front of a house, not on duty or anything, but at least you know they are there. The police station was closed when I was in the city office. The fire department was in the back, which I noticed when I drove by. It's nice to have fire protection available in town.

Library:

- The library was nice and clean.
- It has moved to the business district, but I did not go there.
- I saw a pretty big looking library building on my way into town. I didn't go in, but should have. It looked like a nice building and well-kept.

City parks (walking tracks, ballparks, playgrounds, sports complex)

- The parks and ball fields were nice. The park had various equipment for multiple ages. The swimming pool was a hit with my girls. It was cheap and had enough to keep them playing for several hours.
- The park, pool, tennis court, and baseball diamonds looked like they were newer and well-kept.
- The park looked very nice. There were tennis courts, play equipment, picnic areas – all kinds of fun.

13. Recreation/Tourism

Is the community well-known for any particular attraction or event? Do they have a community slogan that capitalizes on that asset?

- I knew of it from Harper Camperland. I couldn't find any other slogans or attractions.
- There is a rodeo ground and county fairgrounds. They have two other major annual events (October and December).
- The county fair is held here, and I missed it by a week or so. I was surprised that they still held it, as I had heard all county fairs in the US had been cancelled. It would have been nice to see the town hopping. The town slogan is "Come Grow with Us" which seems to be based on the farming aspect of the area, and nothing to do with the county fair.

Did you see any indication of significant events taking place in the community that would be of interest to both visitors and residents?

- We were there the Saturday of the county fair, although we did not know it until we drove past it.
- No.
- I missed the county fair, but did not see anything (aside from the buildings they presumably use) indicating that the town hosts the fair.

Elaborate on any significant natural or manmade features that have the potential of drawing people to the community. (Public art, museums, lakes, campgrounds, regional heritage locations).

- My girls liked the red fish on the top of the water tower.
- The museum and art depot are on the east edge of town far from being noticed. They were not open. There is Anthony Lake and golf course 9 miles south.
- The fountain/lamp post was really cool, and I read a little about it in the Kansas Guidebook. There is a neat mural on Central, and the Guidebook also tells a fun story about the fish at the top of a weathervane. The city park has unique archways, and there is a church that is from a failed English settlement. I would not have know about most of these things had I not had the Guidebook. The church at least had a sign pointing it out.

Is there an obvious visitor's center, chamber of commerce office, main street office, or other facility that serves the needs of visitors? Comment on the staff, facilities, signage, visibility, etc.

- There was a Chamber of Commerce office, but it was closed on the Saturday we were there.
- No.
- There is a city office, well-marked. I wouldn't say it serves the needs of visitors, but it's the closest thing they have.

Are there any restaurants, specialty shops or attractions that would bring you back to this community in the near future?

- The Red Rooster Café and the walk-up ice cream place.
- The Red Rooster restaurant and Anthony Lake.
- I will be back for the antique store and the Red Rooster for sure!

14. Wrap-up

What are the most positive things you observed about the community?

- It had a small town feel.
- Swimming pool and parks.
- Rec facilities were nice.
- A lot of businesses and industry.
- Shared hospital and high school appear to be very nice.
- The highway (which is what most passers-by will see) is very well-kept, clean, and modern.
- The people were quite friendly once you got them chatting.
- It seems like a pretty decent town to live in.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- It is a small town that is too far from the Wichitas of the world.
- It seems moving the school and hospital out of town would be a challenge.
- Housing was available, but many had neighboring houses that had junk-filled porches.
- Many residences and business buildings needing repairs.
- The town and businesses are very spread out.
- Lack of signage – more signage would help.
- Disrepair of the potentially cutest area in the town!
- The logo for the town has the fountain on it, yet that is not the area people will be drawn to.
- Could be some more pride and local history.

- There's nowhere for people to get information about things like the churches, the fish, the fountain. One simple brochure well placed in the city office could do wonders for explorers. The Guidebook also mentions a courthouse? Does that exist?

What will you remember most about this community six months from now (positive or negative)?

- The Red Rooster Café – made me wonder what our small café could become.
- Ice cream place.
- The amount of empty buildings on Main Street. Not really even the emptiness, but the disrepair of them.
- The restaurant.
- The friendly city staff.
- The run-down appearance of the residential and downtown areas.
- I will definitely remember the antique shop – it is exactly the kind of place I love to shop!
- The food at the Red Rooster was SO GOOD.
- I will remember how sad I felt driving down Central/Main looking at all the closed businesses and buildings in poor condition. Perhaps it's just me, but I just LOVE old buildings like that, and always want to see them in use and well-kept.



First Impressions was developed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension and adapted for use by K-State Research and Extension. Restructuring made possible through a partnership with the Dane G. Hansen Foundation. For more information, visit: <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/civic-engagement/first-impressions/index.html>

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Revised 8-12-2020